

*Art. of the Ed. Med. Journal
with the Authors Papers*

REPORT

OF THE

STANDING COMMITTEE

ON

MEDICAL LITERATURE,

ALFRED STILLÉ, M.D., *Chairman*,

Dr. F. G. SMITH,

" T. H. YARDLEY,

" P. C. GAILLARD,

Dr. A. T. MORRIS,

" J. FITHIAN,

" J. B. JOHNSON,

PRESENTED TO THE

AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION,

AT ITS THIRD ANNUAL MEETING, HELD IN CINCINNATI,

MAY, 1850.

PHILADELPHIA:

T. K. & P. G. COLLINS, PRINTERS TO THE ASSOCIATION.

1850.

736038

REPORT ON MEDICAL LITERATURE.

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IN the general aspect of medical journalism, the Committee have to note but few changes during the last year. The number of periodical publications has been increased by two;* and the *St. Louis Medical and Surgical Journal*, which had been suspended since the disastrous fire of that city, has revived within the present year. A greater change has taken place in the brotherhood of editors, some of whom have withdrawn to other departments of professional labour; some have tired of their ill-paid toil and thankless duties; and some have been snatched away by the hand of death. The *Examiner*, the *Southern* and the *Charleston* journals, have lost in part, or wholly, the aid of gentlemen with whom their reputation was in a great degree identified. The *American Journal of Insanity*, the *Ohio Journal*, and the *Western Lanceet*, have met with a severer loss, a loss which is indeed common to the whole profession, for BRIGHAM, BUTTERFIELD, and HARRISON were central lights in their respective spheres.

In the first, we were bereaved of one of those few men whose

* 'The *St. Louis Probe* and the *Northern Lanceet*.

genius and studies fitted him for perceiving the metaphysical relations of medicine in the reciprocal actions of mind and body, and whose skill and devotion did much to achieve for the United States the high reputation it enjoys for the treatment of mental disorders.

In the second, we have lost a medical writer of rare sagacity and extensive information; one whose sprightly style, whether it sharpened the critic's lash, or sparkled with genial and wholesome wit, bespoke him an earnest and truth-loving man.

In the last, we mourn a cherished, though adopted, son of this thriving commonwealth, to which he devoted all the energies of an active and inquiring mind, quenched by a generous enthusiasm, and guided by the lofty principles of a sincere religious faith. No other native of the West did more than Dr. Harrison to organize and strengthen the medical profession around him; none more than he, by literary labour and public instruction, to diffuse a knowledge of his favourite pursuit, or, by the example of a well-spent life, to win for it the respect of the world. It was a worthy termination of such a career, that he should yield his last breath a sacrifice to an uncompromising sense of duty, and fall amidst the tears of those he had rescued from the destroyer. By such reflections must those members of the Association be consoled, who looked forward with satisfaction to meeting here one who bore a conspicuous part in its counsels, and whom it had delighted to honour. May we not hope that the influence of his generous spirit may still survive in our deliberations, and inspire us with that zeal in the cause of humanity which is the best homage that can be paid to the memory and example of the just?

A complaint is often made that the number of medical journals published in the United States is excessive, but whether it is just or not depends upon the manner in which the subject is viewed. No doubt the *average* value of our periodical literature would be enhanced, were its quantity reduced one-half; but it may be strongly questioned whether the *positive* value of the remainder would be increased. At all events, there is good reason to believe that medical journals which have chiefly a local circulation, serve as schools in which unpractised writers may improve themselves. When they become contributors to journals of a more extended sphere, the latter reap all the advantage of their previous culture. Local publications, too, induce many persons, who would not think of approaching the more distant journals, to record their observations and reflections; they serve as a ready vehicle for conveying information to a large

number of practitioners, and for drawing their attention to unexplored or neglected subjects; and they tend to unite the feelings and action of physicians within the region where they circulate, and in this manner to promote the interests of the whole profession.

It has been objected to the character of medical journals in this country that they are, in many instances, established by gentlemen connected with medical schools, and for the purpose, mainly, of sustaining these latter. It must, however, be admitted that the advocacy of particular institutions is seldom, if ever, offensively obtruded; for the most part, it is indirect, and rests upon the merits of the articles furnished by the professors. In this there is certainly no cause for blame; it is rather a laudable means of attracting attention to educational establishments, and of diffusing scientific knowledge in regions which would else participate but slightly in the onward movement of the profession. Persons who have been chosen for their superior acquirements to conduct the education of medical students, may very properly avail themselves of the press to address a larger and more enlightened audience beyond the college walls, and vindicate their ability as instructors.

A large proportion of the journals alluded to may, indeed, contribute scantily to the fund of medical science, or in some instances may perhaps do mischief by giving currency to crude or unsound doctrines; yet it is certain that, by means of materials borrowed from foreign and domestic sources of authority, as well as by a portion of their original matter, they disseminate a greater amount of good than of evil, and, on the whole, are useful auxiliaries in advancing science.

No one could be so exacting as to look for a high degree of scholarship or science in journals published at a distance from the great centres of population, where higher professional reputation rewards the exertion of talent; where the constant association of well-informed men keeps the mind alive to the reception of new ideas; where libraries and all other appliances for literary labour abound; and where the personal criticism of friends and rivals stimulates and encourages, while it exhausts the efforts of those who aim at instructing the profession and themselves. Genius has never yet been able to dispense with such helps, and least of all in the departments of science which deal with external things more than with mental intuitions. To expect from journals that are denied such advantages the same degree of excellence attained by their more fortunate rivals would be in the last degree unreasonable.

We submit that the local journals ought to receive the encourage-

ment of this Association, rather than be harshly censured for defects which they cannot avoid; and if, in any case, severity of criticism be called for, let it rather fall upon such as, in the midst of a population distinguished both for general culture and scientific attainments, display neither elevation of thought nor the evidences of professional ability.

A general review of the articles contained in our periodical medical literature suggests a number of points for comment; but of these only a portion can be noticed on the present occasion, and that briefly.

A large proportion of the original matter consists in descriptions of diseases. In reading many of these reports, one is often forcibly struck with the extreme meagreness and indefiniteness of their details. Oftentimes it is difficult to infer from them the precise nature of the diseases to which they relate, and oftener still the particulars of the narrative are thrown together with so little regard to method, that their examination is unsatisfactory or useless. This defect betrays a general want of training in the art of observation, an art which lies at the very foundation of excellence in the natural sciences. If the original notes of a case have been taken fully and systematically, they readily adapt themselves to expression in a clear and simple style; but if perplexed and disorderly at first, they can scarcely be reduced to a symmetrical form by any rhetorical expedient. Hence the reader is frequently compelled to turn from these histories of disease, disappointed in his search for information, and surprised at the inaccuracy of their language. He frequently finds in them essential and accidental phenomena confounded, and is in doubt whether certain single terms applied to groups of symptoms (such as inflammation, congestion, paralysis, hysteria, typhoid, nervous, &c.) are in reality appropriate, for the misuse of many words begets distrust of all.

Nor is the commentary on these examples apt to be more instructive than the text. Instead of a concise analysis of the phenomena recorded, and a comparison of them with such as have been observed in similar cases; instead of an attempt to estimate the action of the remedies employed, by comparing the symptoms before and after their exhibition; instead of an endeavour to trace a connection between the successive phases of the malady and the several degrees of disorganization found after death, it far too often happens that all of these things are overlooked for the sake of some crude speculations in regard to the proximate cause of the attack, or the *modus operandi* of the remedies employed. Not that such inquiries are devoid of

interest or utility; but they require a tutored sagacity and some learning to be rightly prosecuted, and are, therefore, unlikely to result in discoveries, if conducted without system, and upon the basis of inaccurate or insufficient data.

In the corresponding class of theoretical essays, the defects are still more striking, as might, indeed, be expected; for while in description the least sagacious cannot fail to infuse some truth, in theorizing the wisest cannot avoid mingling a large portion of error. Hence it is always to be regretted that unpractised writers should rashly forsake the safe and beaten highway of nature for the flowery and intricate mazes of speculation, whence they bring back little else than the thorns with which they have been torn. The story of many such calamitous excursions is preserved in our periodical literature.

The *style* of both forms of composition alluded to is very susceptible of improvement. The evidences of haste, prominent as they are, constitute the least of its faults; for too frequently it is chargeable with all the mortal sins which the canons of criticism forbid; it sets at defiance grammar, rhetoric, and logic, and forces upon readers the conviction that they who use their native tongue so awkwardly can hardly be accomplished expounders of science. While we acknowledge most cheerfully the debt which the profession owes to conductors of periodical publications, and are fully aware of the many discouragements that surround them, we are still persuaded that a greater degree of strictness on their part would materially elevate the literary character of their journals. An editor is bound to see that his contributors do not offend the common rules of language, and to refuse their papers if devoid of merit or incurably loaded with faults. In justice even to them, he ought to correct errors of expression and arrangement, if, as frequently happens, such corrections are all that is needed to make an unintelligible essay readable. By a judicious exercise of his prerogative, he will spare them mortification, save his readers from disgust, and protect his own character as a writer from the suspicion of incompetency. If a journal *habitually* publishes articles which are obnoxious to verbal criticism, their imperfections are attributed either to the editor's misplaced leniency or his ignorance, and the support of the profession is withdrawn from his journal. It were much more to the credit of those who control the periodical press, not to wait for this tardy admonition, but to withhold communications until they are purged of the offensive faults which have been pointed out.

They should also, we think, discourage the prevalent tendency of uncultivated minds to theorize, and do all in their power to promote the record of exact and complete accounts of endemic and sporadic diseases, and even of individual cases. For, although each case is by itself of little value, the union and comparison of many are the surest groundwork of medical doctrines. The most trivial, even, is precious when compared with a theory that has its unsubstantial basis in speculation. In building up the temple of science, a single brick may have its uses, and is worthier to be preserved than the most ingeniously woven pyramid of straw, which the next wind of doctrine may sweep away, and which the all-proving fire of truth shall certainly consume.

As before remarked, the greater number of original articles contained in the journals are descriptive. In another class, which may be designated as the historical, the essays contain a summary of a large number of cases (or of authorities, if the subject discussed is one of opinion), together with an analysis of the material employed. These form one of the best executed and most valuable portions of our periodical literature. There remain a few papers on the generalities of medicine, and a still smaller number of experimental essays. In an Appendix to this Report, a classified list is given of all original articles of interest published since May, 1849. In this place, we shall only refer to a few amongst them which are remarkable for accuracy, completeness, ingenuity, or research.

Amongst the histories of epidemics, we select the following for commendation :—

The Yellow Fever of New Orleans, in 1848, by Dr. Fenner.

The Cholera in Buffalo, by Dr. Flint; in Newark, N. J., by Dr. J. H. Clark; in New York, by Dr. Buel; at the N. Y. Quarantine, by Dr. Sterling; in Memphis, by Dr. Shanks; in New Orleans, by Dr. Simonds; and in the Philadelphia Almshouse, by Drs. M. Stillé and Mayer. Dr. Flint's Memoir is entitled to particular notice from the fact of its presenting, in a tabular form, an analysis of sixty-seven cases of cholera.

It may be proper to notice, in this connection, the Report on Cholera as it occurred in Boston, by Drs. Clark, Buckingham, Dalton, and Williams. It was published in pamphlet form, and contains by far the most accurate and detailed analysis of the symptoms, post-mortem appearances, and causes of the malady, which this country has produced. The connection of the disease with influences essentially detrimental to health is conclusively proved, and illustrated in a novel and very striking manner.

Several other papers, based on original observation, possess decided merit, amongst which we would distinguish the following:—

On Hemorrhage from the Umbilicus in new-born Children, by Dr. Bowditch.

Observations on the prevention of Phthisis, and its treatment in the early stage, by Dr. E. Hallowell.

Observations on the Occipital, and Superior Maxillary Bones of the African Cranium, by Dr. J. Neill.

On the use of Ether in Lithotrity and Lithotomy, by Dr. J. M. Warren.

On the use of Chloroform in Midwifery, by Dr. G. N. Burwell.

On Serous Effusion within the Arachnoid, by Dr. A. Flint.

Subjects connected with General Pathology have been well treated of in several Essays, particularly in the Lecture of Dr. Flint on that subject; the Lecture of Dr. Le Conte on the Philosophy of Medicine; an Essay on Inflammation, by Dr. Batchelder; and two Memoirs on Malaria and Contagion, by Dr. S. H. Dickson.

The articles most remarkable for research are:—

An Investigation of the Cases of Hybridity in animals on record, considered in reference to the Unity of the Human Species, by Dr. Bachman.

On the Mortality from Tying the Femoral Artery, by Dr. G. W. Norris.

An Essay on Tumours of the Uterus, and one on the Signs of Portal Phlebitis, by Dr. W. C. Roberts.

On Angina Pectoris, by Dr. Kneeland.

It is remarkable, and it speaks but feebly in praise of our physicians as scientific investigators, that there are but two experimental memoirs of any importance contained in the journals of the last year. One of these describes the continuation of Dr. Blake's ingenious and interesting experiments on the action of poisons; they appear to have been conducted with a full knowledge of previously obtained results, and of the conditions essential to the discovery of new principles. In the other essay, which gives an account of Dr. Dowler's experiments on the nervous system of the alligator, we recognize the author as a zealous and industrious cultivator of physiological science, but at the same time discover that the phenomena described by him are far from countenancing his general statements, and still farther from authorizing the tone of criticism which he adopts towards the most eminent physiologists of the age. It is greatly to be desired that such energy and perseverance, such quickness of conception and vivacity of style as distinguish the author of

this memoir, should be chastened by a habit of more deliberate inquiry, and more cautious reasoning.

The experimental investigation of natural science is a prolific method of discovery; it has created both physiology and medical chemistry, and by it must they be perfected. They form a part of the course in the greater number of our medical schools, and yet we do not remember that a single experimental essay on either of them has emanated from the professors by whom they are taught. The Association has, we think, if not the power of curing this lamentable defect, at least the means of promoting original research, by offering annually a prize for the best experimental essay in physiology or medical chemistry, without specifying any particular subject. No other plan would permit so large a number of competitors to enter the lists, or leave each one so free to follow the bent of his own genius.

We have been thus pointed in alluding to some of the more conspicuous faults in the original department of the medical journals, because we conceive that a committee of this body is bound to perform its duty with directness and candour; but we would be wanting in truthfulness were we not also to acknowledge that so large an amount of valuable materials is contained in the journals as to make them indispensable to writers upon the practice of medicine and surgery. Many of their more prominent articles are cited by native and foreign authors, and in not a few instances they contain the description of a new form of disease, or the proposal of some new method of treatment. The esteem which is now shown to many, would be extended to a much larger number, were the improvements within our reach adopted. The materials and the ability to employ them are abundant; the means of securing them will be pointed out in the sequel.

The department of "Selections," in many journals the largest, is certainly susceptible of a change for the better. The labour-saving expedient by which the work of an editor in selecting and condensing is openly made use of by journals published subsequently to his own, has been justly, and we hope sufficiently, condemned. We rather complain that in scarcely any instance do American medical editors resort directly to foreign continental journals, but are content to borrow the summaries already prepared by the English medical Press. These summaries are far from representing accurately or fully the progress of medicine in Germany, France, and Italy, since they are, for the most part, devoted to the announcement of new discoveries. A large number of valuable essays in which the scattered data of

observation are cemented into consistent doctrines, and which are neglected by British journalists, as well as by our own, might be translated for American periodicals, and serve not less for our instruction in science, than as models in the art of composition. Even if the length of some among these memoirs prevented their complete republication, a faithful analysis of their facts and argument would add sensibly to the interest of the journals, especially if accompanied with a critical comment, and the citation of native authorities.

In a literary point of view, the critical department of the medical journals holds the first rank. As it treats of books, a certain degree of acquaintance with literature is necessary to sustain it, and we accordingly find that in its average style and tone it is superior to the scientific articles that usually precede it. Yet in it, as in them, there may be discerned every variety of merit both in idea and execution; on the one hand learning and elegance of expression, and on the other, shallowness and triviality. The "Reviews," as distinguished from the "Bibliographical Notices," generally present a clear and faithful account of the works to which they relate, with occasional comments, as the opinions of the author and reviewer coincide or diverge. It very rarely happens, in such elaborate analyses, that the pen of criticism appears to be guided by improper feelings, whether of partiality or dislike. They seem, in the great majority of instances, to be dictated by a spirit of justice, and that they are so is rendered probable by the striking unanimity of sentiment expressed in various journals respecting the same work. Exceptions to this statement may undoubtedly be discovered, yet we regard it as a fact, no less certain than praiseworthy, that the medical critics of the United States are remarkably independent in thought and expression. They display but little of that tendency so evident in British periodicals, to proportion the eulogy of a book to the reputation of its author, and to frown upon a work, however meritorious, to which an unknown name is attached. In this matter American critics unquestionably feel the influence of liberal institutions, and appear to be all but unconscious of either hopes or fears inspired by the authors whom they judge.

In point of number, the short criticisms usually called "Notices" exceed the Reviews, but are too often deficient in the qualities which distinguish these latter. Whether it be that leisure is wanting to judge fairly the numerous issues of the medical press, or that so few competent persons can be found to perform the labour, certain it is that in a great many journals the critical notices are extremely flip-

pant, devoid of merit, and unjust to authors. Not that their general tone is one of eensure; so far from it, indeed, that the bitter pill of reprehension is seldom to be discerned amidst the honeyed eulogy with which the author is surfeited, who, if he be a man of manly character, will be more nauseated by such fulsome praise, than he would be wounded by downright condemnation. We have no suspicion that our periodical literature is chargeable with the practice which has robbed the eriticism of politcal and minor literary journals of every semblance of value, and converted many of them into the stipendiary pimps of impotent scribblers, or made them the hired assassins of literary character. Yet so far as authors are concerned, their interests are quite as much sacrificed by indiscriminate and motiveless praise, as they could be were the motives of such praise impure.

The sources of these defects are not mysterious. The chief one is that the "notices" referred to seem to be generally written by persons who are either ignorant of the subject treated of, or else who take no pains to inform themselves by a careful perusal of the pages before them. Ludicrous mistakes are not an unfrequent result. An author, for instance, is blamed for teaching doctrines he has laboured to refute, or is warmly commended for holding opinions which he has carefully eschewed. We could refer to a case in which certain precepts were roundly denounced, and the author triumphantly referred to the works of a distinguished foreign writer for the proofs of his ignorance, when it so happened that he had maintained the correctness of his precepts by the very authority which was cited against him. Sometimes it is almost susceptible of demonstration that the critic has never ventured beyond the title page and preface of the volume on which he pronounces oracular judgment. The terms, too, in which the judgment is expressed, are not the least amusing part of this counterfeit criticism, since with trifling transpositions they serve for repeated issues, and may be compared to the blanks used by conveyancers, in which the names and descriptions only are changed with successive customers, while the declaratory part of the document remains the same for all.

The evil that has been pointed out is one of serious import in a country so extended as ours, and in which so large a proportion of physicians must govern their purchases of books by the opinions of them contained in medical journals. Far better would it be that new publications should pass unnoticed by the press, than that they should be spoken of only to be misrepresented. And we repeat that it makes no difference whether the misrepresentation be eulogistic or

damnatory, for it is the right of the reader to be addressed truly, and of the author to be judged fairly. If the critic lose sight of his duty in these respects, he ceases to be a trustworthy guide to the public, or faithful to the literature of which he is a professed champion. An author really deserving of the name looks to the tribunal of periodical criticism for advice and instruction, is anxious to know how his writings appear to different minds, and only asks that they may be candidly examined before judgment is pronounced upon them. He receives with equal disfavour the vague compliments, and the malicious railing, which fall upon him in nearly equal profusion from opposite quarters, and too often seeks in vain for that candid estimate of his work which can only proceed, after calm inspection, from the pen of a just man.

The critic's duties, which are amongst the most important and honourable within the domain of literature, do not, we think, always receive the serious consideration to which they are entitled. They resemble those of the judicial station, and, for their due performance demand a high degree of those qualities which all men regard as indispensable to the expounders of the law. If the judge ought to be "learned in the law," so ought the critic to be familiar with the subject of the work that is cited at his bar, well read in treatises of a similar nature, and acquainted with the actual condition of the department of medicine to which it relates. As the administrator of justice should dispense the law without fear, favour, or affection, so should the arbiter of literary and scientific questions preserve a mind unbiassed by prejudice or partiality. As he is called on, like the judge, to give opinions respecting doctrines, and conclusions arrived at by process of reasoning, he should be acquainted with the forms and powers of language, and be a skilful analyst of thought and argument.

Although the critic is forbidden by every motive of propriety to assail, or, in most instances, even to allude to the personal character of the author, it is not less his right than his duty to obtain a clear insight into the moral character of the work before him. Indeed, such an estimate lies at the very foundation of the proper exercise of his functions. It is a waste of labour to criticise *on scientific grounds* a work that is dishonest in its statements. Science is only another name for truth, and all truth is one, although there are many manifestations of truth, as a single musical sound may consist of many different but harmonious notes combined. A literary or scientific treatise is valuable in so far only as it is true; no copious-

ness of words, no accuracy of expression, no brilliancy of metaphor, no ingenuity of argument, no richness of materials, no aptness of illustration, can atone for, or even palliate, a disregard of the paramount claims of truth.

It is the property of error to spring up suddenly, and spread rapidly, and it is equally the nature of truth to arise from obscure beginnings, and advance to its destined conquest by slow and often unseen steps. The one is greedily devoured by the multitude, but men turn away from the other with indifference or distaste. It is, therefore, incumbent on the critic to attack the former when it appears in the guise, not only of false doctrine, but of false morality, pretending to be what it is not, and cheating those who are unsuspecting of its deceit. In fulfilling this duty, he should be inflexible, remembering that the honour of the profession and the interests of humanity are at stake. In cases, even, that involve no moral delinquency, but only the propagation of mischievous errors, he ought not to shrink from exposing their deformity, veiled though it be in all the beauties of a luxuriant style, or surrounded by the fallacious defences of sophistry; he should tear it up as a poisonous root from its shelter of fair leaves and flowers, and cast it forth from among the wholesome plants which the same soil produces. We cannot be too often reminded that, while in other sciences mistaken opinions and false doctrines are only remotely dangerous, erroneous views in medicine receive a direct and immediate application by which life itself may be sacrificed.

After he has become convinced that a work gives sufficient evidence of right intentions in its preparation, the critic has still a difficult and responsible task before him. He should endeavour to place himself in the author's position, and from that point of view, determine how nearly the author's object has been attained. For it is obviously unfair to judge of the correctness of his conclusions upon different grounds from those he has thought proper to assume. A writer, for example, who faithfully describes a disease as it occurred under his own observation, cannot be blamed if his description does not tally with what has been recorded elsewhere. His *plan* of treating his subject is a proper theme for discussion, but the merits or defects of the plan are not to be confounded with those of the actual description, or of the argument employed.

It is equally unjust to judge a book upon the evidence of fragments gathered at random from its pages, torn from their natural connection, and withdrawn from the light which a perusal of the

entire treatise would shed upon them. Yet this is one of the prevalent vices of that summary criticism which we have censured; its injurious tendency must be too apparent to require any farther illustration.

Not only should the critic endeavour to view the work before him as a whole, but also to distinguish between its merit in this respect, and the value of its several parts. A treatise may be very deficient in effective generalization, and yet remarkable for the accuracy and completeness of its details; or, on the other hand, it may display a very high order of abstract reasoning, and yet furnish very incomplete and irrelevant data as the basis of its argument. How much soever the value of the work may be impaired by such a want of harmony between its facts and arguments, the author is fully entitled to praise for what he has done, even while he incurs censure for what he has omitted, or failed to accomplish. We have been induced to direct attention to the distinction here insisted upon, because it appears to be seldom recognized by critics, who are too apt to praise or condemn without qualification, according as they happen to be impressed with the unity of purpose displayed in a work, or with the completeness of its component parts.

The last duty of the critic's office to which allusion will now be made is that of distinguishing between the manner and the matter of a work. In general literature, whose object is as much to please as to instruct, style is regarded as the first, and perhaps the paramount requisite for success. In scientific composition, on the other hand, the simplest formula of expression, that which renders the idea most distinctly visible, is undoubtedly the best. But such a style is perhaps the most difficult achievement of rhetorical skill, a style of such transparent simplicity that the reader scarcely feels it as a barrier between his mind and the author's idea. It is like those exquisite forms of classical art in which the bodily eye sees less the marble or the canvass, than the mind's eye beholds the abstract beauty of which they are the visible signs. The difficulty of acquiring a clear and simple style in some measure accounts for the obscurity of language that defaces some of the most remarkable treatises, and sufficiently inculcates the propriety of distinguishing between the merit of an author's thought and language. Critics are too prone to be blind to truths veiled in the coarse texture of a rude and obscure style, and to mistake for brilliant thoughts whatever is seen through the gossamer and glittering drapery woven by rhetorical cunning. Although it is not easy to overcome the repug-

nance which is involuntarily felt towards the one, or to resist the seductive graces of the other, yet to this mastery over his impulses must the critic attain, if he would secure the confidence and respect of his readers. Especially must he, as a minister of our infant literature, be always on the alert to detect whatever is good in the immature productions of authors still unknown to fame, and by a candour no less generous in praise than delicate in censure, encourage while he chastens the aspirants to literary reputation. Let him never divert one breath of favouring wind from the humblest bark that steers by the polar star of truth, nor fail to thrust through, without relenting, the inflated bladders upon which vanity would float at ease over the waves of popularity.

A Catalogue of the medical works published in the United States since the last meeting of the Association, is appended to this Report. The enumeration is such as could be made from the sources of information accessible to the Committee. These consisted almost wholly of publishers' lists, and the Review department of the journals, for, with few exceptions, the works themselves were not submitted to our examination.

Of the original works in this catalogue, the most extensive and important is the first volume of Dr. Drake's *Treatise on the Principal Diseases of the Interior Valley of North America*. This volume, which contains nearly nine hundred pages, is taken up with the medical topography, the climate, the manners of the inhabitants, and the autumnal fevers of this vast region. Owing to the late period of its publication, the Committee have been unable to examine the treatise thoroughly, and they might, therefore, rest contented with a bare announcement of its existence. But they are reluctant to do so, since even a superficial inspection of the work has convinced them that it belongs to the very highest rank of our medical literature, and may very probably come to be regarded as the most valuable original work yet published in America. It is certainly unrivalled in the amount and variety of its materials; its style is perspicuous, correct, and elevated; and it appears to have been elaborated with great industry and care. Its distinguished author has raised a durable monument to his own name, and to the medical reputation, not only of the Great Valley, but of the greater Union.

"*Physician and Patient; or, a Practical View of the Mutual Duties, Relations, and Interests of the Medical Profession and the Community,*" is the title of a work by Dr. Worthington Hooker, of Norwich, Conn. Nowhere else have the subjects of this treatise

been so fully and satisfactorily discussed. The author pleads the cause of medicine with the most cogent and persuasive arguments, and in a style at once simple, correct, and attractive. He evidently loves his profession, and reflects in his language the lineaments of a cultivated mind and an upright character. Physicians, in becoming acquainted with this interesting work, will find that it contains every needful protection against the seductions of false doctrine, and abundant encouragement to bear with serenity and fortitude the inevitable ills which beset the medical practitioner's path.

A large portion of the volume is occupied in exposing the different impostures which, under the name of medical systems, are filching the money and wasting the lives of the community. These chapters of the work are addressed to the public, with a view of convincing them of the unworthiness of such pretenders to their confidence, and of inducing a juster estimate of the art of medicine than is now popular. Admitting, without reserve, the ability and moderation manifested in the discussion, we are still persuaded that the author will make few or no converts amongst the patrons of quackery, for the starting-point of his effort is not the true one. It is in vain to look for their conversion from error, by means of argument, who have fallen into it through passion or prejudice. Men do not resort to quackery because they have gained a rational conviction of its value; for how shall they regard anything as a subject of reason who are completely ignorant of the principles it involves? They resort to it because they are ignorant and credulous; or because they are self-sufficient, and, therefore, still more credulous. And they will continue to resort to it for all time to come; for to enable them to comprehend the absurdity of quackery would be to make them physicians, a thing neither possible nor desirable.

Reasoning, perhaps, never yet saved a single dupe from the fool's fate; the scales seldom fall from his eyes till he has beheld some cherished object sacrificed to the bloody Moloch of quackery. Even then he sometimes seems smitten with judicial blindness, and clamours more loudly than ever in praise of his hideous idol, as the drunkard extols the bottle most when it has most nearly destroyed him. Even if he outlives the cheat (and the quackmonger must be short-lived, indeed, if he do not), another equally absurd supplants the first, and holds him by a sort of devil's compact, until repentance is in vain. Every physician must have witnessed examples of such tardy and ineffectual regret.

The attempt to eradicate quackery must fail now as it has always done. Its very weakness is its strength ; and it is certainly unwise to deal the sturdy blows of science upon a thing which, mushroom-like, springs up in the darkness of human ignorance, and in the rankness of human folly. The deceptive systems which captivate the silly and presumptuous of both sexes do so in exact proportion to their absurdity, and this alone would be reason enough for not appealing to men's reason against them ; but it should not be forgotten that in every one of them some little grain of truth lies concealed, just as every vice contains the distorted image of some virtue, and every false religion some element of the true. This bestows upon them whatever brief and feeble vitality they possess. They have their uses too ; for they often illustrate the powers of medicines prescribed as no physician would dare prescribe them, or show how far unassisted nature is able successfully to struggle with disease. These rank weeds of the garden of science, when they have done their permitted mischief and rotted, serve to manure the soil which they have dishonoured, and show that, in the plans of Providence, the vilest things are not without their purpose.

The treatise of Dr. John Bell, on *Baths and the Watery Regimen*, is rather a new work than a new edition of a previous one, devoted in part to the same subject. Its appearance is very opportune at this moment, when so much of mischief and folly is enacted under the auspices of the Hydropathic heresy.

The author's learning and critical acuteness are successfully employed to show the antiquity and the real value of the use of water for the preservation of health and the cure of disease, the first of which objects he rightly holds to be the more important. He does not confine himself to a consideration of the uses of water, but treats amply, and in a spirit of sound discrimination, of all the methods by which medicinal vapours and fluids may be employed to the advantage of the animal economy. No work in our language contains so large an amount of well-digested information respecting the above subjects, and we have reason to feel proud that such an addition to the permanent literature of the profession should have been made by one of our own citizens.

The *Universal Formulary*, by Dr. Eglesfeld Griffith, is a very useful contribution to the list of works intended to aid practitioners in the art of prescribing. It is more copious than any other com-

pilation of prescriptions, and more complete than any similar work in all that relates to the management of the sick, the rules for dosing and administering medicines, and the application of external remedies. It cannot fail to be appreciated by physicians who are duly sensible of the importance of the minor details, on which success often depends quite as much as upon the general principles of therapeutics.

Dr. J. J. Reese's *American Medical Formulary* is a well-executed compilation upon the same general plan, but less elaborate and comprehensive than the one just mentioned.

The Practice of Surgery, embracing Minor Surgery, &c., by Dr. Hastings, U. S. N., has found favour in the eyes of some critics, and but for serious defects of arrangement, might be regarded as a convenient manual for students. Its errors of style, however, and the somewhat indefinite character of its descriptions and directions, betraying, as they do, great haste of composition, and an imperfect acquaintance with surgical literature, diminish the merit which the work might otherwise have claimed.

Several translations of medical works have appeared during the last year. Tardieu on *Cholera*, by Dr. S. L. Bigelow; De Jongh on *Cod-Liver Oil*, by Dr. Edward Carey; and Cazzaux's *Midwifery*, by Dr. R. M. Thomas. These are all works of merit, but the last especially is well deserving of an English dress, as emanating from the distinguished obstetrical school of which Nægclé was the founder, and Dubois is one of the most eminent teachers. The translator deserves credit, on the whole, for performing his task so well. The task of translating is vastly more difficult than is commonly imagined; and a reader aware of this fact and acquainted with the original, will be disposed to overlook faults which another would scarcely perceive.

The Diseases of Infants and Children, by Dr. Churchill, presents, we believe, the only instance in which the work of a foreigner, resident abroad, has been published first in the United States. This circumstance adds to the satisfaction of receiving so valuable a contribution to a department already enriched by several of our most distinguished writers.

The Monograph of Dr. Carnochan on *Congenital Dislocations of the Femur* belongs to a class of books which has but few representatives in this country. Treatises on special subjects have a limited circulation at first, but, if meritorious, grow more valuable by the lapse of time. The present one treats of a disease which does not appear to have attracted much attention from English or American surgeons. It augments the knowledge previously derived from continental authorities, by the personal and well-recorded experience of the author, and its execution is, in all respects, deserving of praise.

The preceding survey of a portion of our medical literature suggests some general reflections to which we beg leave to draw the attention of the Association.

In its widest sense, literature may be defined "the knowledge imparted through books." It is the principal medium through which mind acts on mind; it is the creative spirit which evokes from the shapeless mass of barbarism the beautiful forms of civilization. It is the most enduring monument which a nation can raise to perpetuate the memory and example of its noble deeds. When the marble temple and the bronze statue have crumbled, when even the lineage of a nation has disappeared and its language ceased to be a mother tongue, its literature may still survive, and transmit the impress of its mind to the latest generations. The mind and manners of Greece still stand before us in living pictures, while the cotemporary empires of the East, which far outshone the little States of the Peninsula in all the elements of mere material grandeur, would now be utterly unknown, had not their names been embalmed in the writings of a people they affected to despise. How wonderful and instructive is the reflection that the tiny republic of Athens should at this moment fill so large a space in the world's reverence, and still govern mankind with so predominant a sway, while the splendid kingdoms of Darius and Cyrus should have so faded from remembrance that the very Arab, encamping upon their buried capitals, is unconscious of the city that slumbers beneath his tent!

A certain number of nations, it has been remarked, bear the decisive stamp of their inferiority, their improgressiveness. But "the nations that are historic and progressive contain in themselves the means and instruments by which their progress may be effectuated, namely, literature; literature as connecting one nation

with others diversely though equally cultivated, and as connecting the present with the past, and with the future. They possess that which gives a continuity to time, and emancipates both individuals and communities from the hard necessity of existing as successive fragments—like a glow-worm in the scanty circle of its own light, all before and all behind, and save in the narrowest vicinity, all around—in impenetrable darkness.”—(Mr. J. H. Green, *Hunterian Oration*, 1847.)

These truths, which are so striking in reference to the entire literature of a people, are quite as applicable to the history of its several departments, and to none more than that of medicine. Although it has had its full share in the vicissitudes of individual nations, and passed through its own alternate epochs of prosperity and depression, yet its march has in the main been onwards. The torch of medical science was kindled at the altar of Eseulapius, and after long shedding its light upon Greece, was seized by the Roman world. Modern Europe revived its sinking flame, and caused it to burn with a lustre that has penetrated to every region of the globe. We live in its genial light, and the time may yet arrive when we shall in our turn become the chief guardians of the sacred fire.

Scarcely any literature can boast of a genealogy so distinct and eminent as that of medicine; for, while nearly every other has had, as it were, a number of successive births, has arisen independently amongst different nations, and worn the peculiar physiognomy of each, the medical literature of every age is the legitimate issue of that which preceded it, and bears the same family features at nearly all periods of its existence, so that the maxims of the fathers of the art continue to be fountains of truth in all time. In looking back upon the history of our science, the eye instinctively rests upon certain remarkable epochs, simply because they are illustrated by eminent works. It is impossible to avoid the conviction that the state of medical literature at any period is the true and only test of the condition of the contemporary science and art; and if the history of medicine sustains this conviction relative to all past time, we may safely conclude that it is also true of the present, and that the merit of the profession in a country may be inferred from the state of its literature. If discoveries in science are made, they will of necessity be recorded; and if physicians are learned or scientific, they will create a literature to represent themselves, unless, indeed, the press be shackled by repressive laws, or the cost of employing it exceed their means.

Now it is certain that in the United States no such obstacles lie in the way of authors. Our magistrates seldom attempt even to reprove licentiousness in writing, and still less do they throw impediments in the way of the just and honest action of the press. It cannot be said that we lack the means of publishing what we will, so long as every village, and almost every political party in each, is represented by a newspaper, and at least a score of journals are devoted to the interests of medicine alone. There would seem, then, to be no reason why the medical literature of the profession should not be taken to denote the degree of knowledge and skill existing in the profession. We are well aware that the republication here of foreign books has been assigned as a sufficient explanation of the state of our native medical literature, but it is evident that so far as this influence is hurtful, it can be so only by diminishing the *number* of American works; it must just as certainly improve the *quality* of those which are actually published.

During the last half century, a very considerable number of original medical works has issued from the American press. Of these a very large proportion relate to the practical departments of medicine, and very few to the elementary, or, more strictly, scientific branches. Of the latter, nearly all are compilations intended to be used as text-books in the schools. These facts present an apt illustration of the principles that have been propounded. Our attention has been almost exclusively absorbed by the art of medicine, by the application of doctrines and precepts originating in the Old World, and our literature reflects this truth. An examination of its extent, and of the works composing it, offers many occasions for indulging a feeling of just pride on account of the discriminating tact, sound judgment, and patient industry displayed, but at the same time reveals defects which, however we may explain them, are sufficient to exclude the works in question from the highest rank.

With a few remarkable exceptions, our medical works exhibit a low degree of scholarship, both general and professional. In point of style they are sensibly inferior to native treatises on law and theology, some of which have won for their authors a reputation coextensive with the republic of letters. This apparent enigma is not difficult of solution. Members of the bar seldom appear as authors without having a definite qualification for the office; the subjects of which they treat are abstruse and complex; the mode of discussing them is in a great degree regulated by that which previous writers have employed, and they require for their elucidation

great precision of thought and expression. There is no medium—scarcely any mediocrity—in such a literature. Either the writer succeeds, or altogether fails. Mental discipline and legal learning are well understood to be the price of success, and they who cannot afford to pay this price but seldom aspire to its reward.

In theology, too, the conditions are favourable to the production of qualified authors. Nearly all denominations of Christians exact a classical and collegiate course of instruction from those who intend to pursue theological studies, which are in themselves only a continuation of the previous course in some of the higher and more difficult branches. Thought, language, and the principles of interpretation are the very materials with which the theological student and writer has all his life long to deal, and he must be dull indeed, if, with all his elementary training, he does not obtain a competent mastery of them.

But the physician is not prevented by the inherent difficulties of his subject on the one hand, nor on the other by his lack of fundamental instruction, from appearing as an author. He is apt to suppose that merely to describe what he has witnessed, or to explain his observations by some recognized principle, will entitle him to rank as an author, forgetting that, in order to render his description clear, and to apply to it correctly some medical doctrine, he should be possessed of that command over language, and that familiarity with the processes of reasoning, which can seldom be acquired without a thorough liberal education.

It is in the prevalent imperfection of the early education of our physicians that the principal cause of their inferiority as writers is to be found. And this cause, it should be particularly remarked, is operative not only by withholding the necessary foundation for literary excellence, but in a still more striking manner by preventing that habit of literary culture, and that study of the master-pieces of thought in all departments of knowledge, by which the mind is kept pure from the debasing contact of the world, and is enabled to ascend at will into a more intellectual sphere. Unless early studies develop a taste for mental pleasures, indifference to them may be expected to continue throughout life, and in the same degree will the habitual mode of thought and expression lend itself to the impression of outward and accidental influences.

A neglect of early training begets another fault which is almost as conspicuous in English medical literature as in our own: it is an imperfect use or the misuse of the reasoning powers. The acute

observer is, indeed, the necessary pioneer in every search after scientific truth. He is the labourer who must extract the marble from the quarry, and rough-hew it into shape; yet an architect must follow him to set the fragments in their fitting place in the temple of science. Neither can be dispensed with; the co-operation of both is essential to the perfection of the work, or, if possible, the union in one person of the qualities of both. Facts, like stones, are only valuable when used. The growth of true knowledge depends less upon the mere impressions received through observation, than upon the action which the mind exerts upon them. Reflection, abstraction, and generalization, when duly employed upon the materials received from without, build up the fabric of true knowledge and wisdom, which it is impossible to raise in the mind of him who passes from one physical phenomenon to another without perceiving the links which bind them together, or is content with the pleasurable emotion which their novelty excites, or which his own good fortune in meeting with them inspires. These operations of the intellect may be all comprised under the general term reasoning, and he who reasons most, if he reasons aright on what he beholds, most surely widens the field of knowledge, and sows within it the most productive seeds. The lamentable propensity of writers and teachers to delineate or model every subject, so that it can be presented to the senses, has hurried us into forgetfulness of those faculties which are the true instruments of mental power and sources of wisdom. Many a physician is to be found well versed in anatomy, physiology, and symptomatology, who would yet be at a loss to demonstrate the reciprocal relations of these branches, or to follow the chain of their phenomena to its legitimate conclusion. Between facts without reasoning and reasoning without facts, the choice is certainly not dubious; but since neither alone fulfills the purpose of a scientific treatise, we may be permitted to hope for their conjunction in our medical literature, when observers shall feel that learning clears the vision, and speculators learn the instability of castles built on air.

To imperfect education, then, may the prominent faults of our medical literature be ascribed; but that vagueness of idea and want of dignity with which it is charged, in common with our native compositions generally, are due also to influences of a different kind. A distinguished senator, whose own style is a model of clearness, strength, and propriety, has said that the speeches of Congressmen have gone far to corrupt the vernacular. But how much greater corruption must it receive from the newspapers, which are the chief

mental aliment of our countrymen, and the style of which, in too many instances, combines whatever is vulgar and tawdry in expression with a narrowness of purpose and a sordidness of sentiment beyond example. A writer can seldom emancipate himself from his habitual associations; if the ordinary speech of his country is corrupted by terms borrowed from the dialect of the ignorant, the profligate, or the mean, he will not, unless protected by refined studies, be able to adopt a purer style even when the noblest thoughts crowd upon him for utterance. And, let it be remarked, in passing, that the evil of a debased popular idiom does not stop here; it not only cramps the hand that would indite wise and generous sentiments, but, by making the expression of such sentiments unusual, ends in drying up their source, and thus depraves the character of a nation after having vitiated its language.

Language is the sensible sign of thought. The language of nations, professions, or individuals, represents their habitual modes of thinking, feeling, and acting, is the index of their character, and assigns to them their rank as members of society. If their character be noble and intellectual, and their actions vigorously directed to great enterprises, their thoughts and language will be varied, elevated, and forcible. Thus it is that thought and action are mutually dependent, begetting one another by a perpetual generation; but the primary germ of all greatness is great thoughts.

Physiologists teach that the animal is essentially nerve. To this part of the organism all the rest is subservient, either as a means of sustaining it, or as the agent of its power. In it resides the principle of thought. What the nervous system is to the animal, mind is to a nation. They who think for a people govern and represent that people. Knowledge, and the skill depending on intelligence, may be more generally distributed in some countries than in others, but must in all be restricted to comparatively few persons, and these few are practically the rulers of the state, whether its constitution be democratic or monarchical. Raise the standard of attainment as we may, impart knowledge to as many as we will, a portion, and by far the larger portion of society, must continue to expend their energies on the merely physical duties of life. The same result, precisely, is observable in every profession or pursuit which embraces both a practical and a theoretical department, which is at the same time an art and a science. It is so in medicine. This profession must include both thinkers and doers, and many more of the latter than of the former, since few comparatively are

endowed with the highest faculties, or possess the requisite means either for cultivating genius, or for subjecting the mind to that long discipline and instruction which sometimes render it capable of far more than untutored genius can accomplish.

Under the actual form of our government, and even in our most favoured seats of learning, it is difficult to attain distinction in art or science, for want of a system of thorough training. At a distance from these centres of comparative enlightenment, in obscure villages, and interior towns, languish for lack of encouragement many strong thinkers, who yet can scarcely think to the best purpose even for their own need, and who can still less impart profitable instruction to their pupils and others within the range of their influence. Many such minds which now glimmer in obscurity, or doubtfully illuminate a narrow circle, might, with even moderate opportunities for development, become brilliant and beacon lights to the profession.

Even in the Old World provincial merit seldom rises to an elevated position. Under the system of political centralization which there prevails, capital, learning, talent, ability of every sort, seeks the metropolis, where alone the fostering care of government and of associated influence is fully experienced. In the United States, an opposite political system exists. Local legislation, that of the municipality, the borough, or the township, covers nearly all of the relations between man and man, and little is left to the central government beyond the relations of citizens to the commonwealth, and the Union. This peculiarity, more than any other that affects our political condition, makes every American feel his importance as a member of the nation, and actually renders his personal character an instrument of incalculable good or evil. Now the intellectual must be in harmony with the political development of a people. If a whole nation is elevated in the political scale when its individual members enjoy equal political rights, then will it be raised intellectually, if the same means of enlightenment are open to every citizen. In like manner, if the medical profession as a whole shall ever reach its proper station amongst the learned fraternities of the country, it will be when the avenues to science are filled with educated men, when the inquiry shall become general, not how little, but how much, it is possible to learn, before assuming the title and the grave responsibilities of a physician. Then, and not before, may we see our medical literature redeemed from the reproach of feebleness which it now bears, and its value as the organ of thought of the profession duly appreciated.

Yet it is not by the attainment of such a degree of excellency alone as lies within the reach of the mass of the profession, that our literature can become historical, can take its place by the side of European science, and discharge the debt which it owes to foreign benefactors. The average knowledge of the profession can by no possibility be very exalted, and, were we to rest satisfied that each member should possess no more than every other, the highest attainment would be a respectable but stationary mediocrity. There will always be minds that must starve on such mental food as abundantly suffices for ordinary intellects. To supply such minds with this rarer and nobler nourishment, places and means must be provided. But not for their sake alone. The level lake of popular knowledge will be dried up, unless it is replenished by streams that flow perennially from the hills where talent has built its reservoirs, and from the cloud-capped mountains where genius pours forth its living waters. Neither they who write for ordinary capacities, nor those who read, appear to recognize, as fully as they should, the fact that by far the greater part of popular treatises are little else than abridgments of works prepared by a higher class of authors for more cultivated readers, or commentaries on texts furnished by men of genius. The true exponents of the literature of an epoch or profession are not the most popular works, but those from which popular works are extracted, those which are fullest of invention and discovery, those to which the historian will afterwards point as the monuments of their time. No argument need be adduced to prove that these can only be created by a system of exceptional culture above and different from what is suited to the average wants of the profession; that there must be seats of professional learning whither all may resort who have exhausted the ordinary means of instruction, and yet thirst for higher knowledge. At present, no such institutions exist in this country; and hence nearly all writers who have adorned the native literature of our science have been compelled to seek abroad the culture which they vainly wished for at home, and, as an inevitable result, to adopt opinions, and habits of expression which have tended to make their works pale copies of transatlantic originals, when they should have been stamped with the characteristics of the American mind. An elevated, distinctive, and permanent medical literature cannot, we think, be hoped for until some one of our schools shall adopt a much higher system of instruction than has yet been thought of, and, instead of looking to minor institutions for the measure of its advancement, look upwards only to the sub-

line purpose of education, receive into its bosom those alone who are fitted by their accomplishments and their ambition to honour the profession, and resolve that the American student shall be perfected upon American soil.

On such a purpose, steadily maintained, and supported by every expedient that is calculated to develop and mature the talent of those who enter upon medical pursuits, must the hopes of our professional literature after all repose, and not upon any narrow-minded attachment to American literature for its own sake merely. It is not to be pampered because it is a native growth, but to be fostered because it is good or capable of becoming so. It would ill become us to imitate the people of China and Japan, who pride themselves upon their stunted and effeminate civilization, and look with contempt upon the sciences and arts of the outside barbarians. A feeling of nationality in literature is, within just limits, a mighty stimulus to the production of works which extend the empire of the mind, but, carried beyond a certain point, becomes high treason to the universal republic of letters, and "confines to a sect what was meant for mankind." While, then, every lover of his country must be ambitious of raising to its glory the only imperishable memorial that human skill can construct, a national literature, he ought to remember that the work will crumble of its own weakness, unless its foundations are deeply and securely laid in that knowledge which is of no one time or place, but is the common product of all ages, and of the whole civilized world.

In the progress of this Report, various measures adapted to improve medical literature have been suggested incidentally, as they grew out of the subjects under discussion. Allusion was particularly made to the influence of prizes offered by local societies, and this Association, for the best descriptive and experimental essays. Two or three points remain to be briefly noticed. One of the obstacles to the improvement of our periodical literature is the small inducement presented to really capable writers to sacrifice their time and labour in literary pursuits. Men will not bestow their strength for naught, and it cannot be expected that physicians, who are already so ill paid for professional services, will seriously attend to the duties of authorship, unless they are to be remunerated. Here and there a writer may possibly be found who stands in no need of a pecuniary return for his toil, and whose industry wants no sharper spur than his ambition; but such cases are quite exceptional, and the greater number of those with whom writing is not a part of

the business of life, take up the pen for amusement and lay it down again in a moment of weariness, or at the suggestion of caprice. Occasionally they may complete some important work, building its successive stages as leisure or inclination serves; but such motives and opportunities would never succeed in sustaining the periodical literature of the profession. Nor can such persons so well perform the labour, however willingly they may undertake it. A writer who is paid for his contribution feels bound by stronger motives to do his duty faithfully, for he is a party to an explicit contract. But the volunteer contributor is tempted to imagine that he is conferring a favour upon the editor who seeks or accepts his assistance, and he accordingly indulges himself, too often, in careless thought and style, spares himself much useful research, and deals with his subject as if it were a plaything. As a critic he is too apt to disdain the labour of acquiring a just notion of the author's merit, and prefers the easier method of exalting him with pompous eulogy, or of assailing him with commonplace invective. We are very far from suggesting that all who bestow their labour as a free gift upon the periodical literature of the profession are so regardless of what is due to self-respect and justice; but it can scarcely be doubted that many articles which we see in the journals with regret, derive most of their faults from their character as gratuitous contributions. While so liberal a spirit of sacrifice demands a grateful acknowledgment, it were still to be desired that a stricter system of accountability prevailed in the relations of editors and periodical writers, and that the journals, through its means, might be redeemed from much of the superficiality and other signs of haste which so frequently disfigure their pages. Were authors properly, or even at all, remunerated, editors would enjoy more freedom, and would no longer, through fear of giving offence, refrain from chastening or even rejecting imperfect papers. Whether it is possible or not to bring about any such improvement in journals whose editorial functions are themselves discharged gratuitously, it is not our purpose to inquire, but merely to point out what we regard as a means of correcting an existing evil.

The superficial character of very much that is published in medical journals has been attributed, also, to the scanty sources of information to which the writers have access. Even in large cities, private professional libraries are seldom well furnished, and elsewhere there are no collections of books sufficient for the investigation of scientific questions. Neither the history of medicine nor its contemporaneous progress is familiar to many physicians; and while such is the case,

it is not surprising that notions should be laboriously expounded which have long ago been consigned to the receptacle of broken literary wares, or that discoveries should be announced as original which are already the current coin of the profession. A plan easy of execution, and which will tend to prevent such mistakes, as well as cultivate every faculty that should distinguish a physician, is the formation of local reading clubs and libraries. Wherever a dozen or twenty persons will unite for the purpose, a small annual subscription by each will suffice to obtain for the common advantage, several of the best foreign and domestic journals, and all of the most valuable works published during the year. These may be read by each member of the club in turn, according to an order and at intervals agreed upon, and finally deposited in some central locality where they can be readily consulted. A method of this sort has, we know, been pursued for many years by an association of gentlemen, who, by its means, obtain the most distinguished journals of continental Europe, some of which, indeed, do not reach this country, in the ordinary course of exchange. An expedient so simple, and so salutary in its tendency, needs no extended discussion. Its value must be apparent to every one, both immediately, as an abundant source of instruction, and remotely as a powerful agent in diffusing a love of letters, and in keeping alive that feeling of brotherhood to the profession, which is apt to decline where one lives isolated, or is engrossed with the petty rivalries of his neighbourhood. If but few students of medicine have any consciousness of the misery and danger of ignorance, their self-deception is not permanent, for we suspect that there are few practitioners who do not deplore their imperfect preparation for professional duties. To the latter class of persons the plan suggested recommends itself sufficiently as a means of repairing wilful or unavoidable neglect, but it also seems in every respect to deserve the approbation and adoption of physicians generally.

The considerations and suggestions which have been presented have all a more or less direct relation to measures which are adapted to encourage and maintain "a national literature" of our own. But the Committee would regard their duty as imperfectly fulfilled, were they to leave out of view another measure which is still more intimately connected with a "national literature," or one having distinctive American characters. It is unnecessary to repeat what has already been urged to show that the permanent historical greatness of a people depends upon their native literature. Now nothing can be

plainer than that a nation which offers a bounty for the re-publication of foreign works represses and discourages to the same extent the formation of a native literature. In this singular position stand the United States. No sooner does an English work of merit or interest pass our custom house than it is seized by some member of the publishing trade, perhaps by several at once, and is shortly found in every book-shop in the Union, and sold at a price sufficient to pay only for the mechanical labour of its printing and distribution. Nothing of what goes to make up its intrinsic value as a literary or scientific work is included in its commercial price, and its author, by whose labour thousands of readers are instructed or amused, derives no benefit whatever from this un-sanctioned appropriation of his toil. The American author, meanwhile, who had in preparation, or actually completed, a kindred work, suddenly discovers that the manuscript upon which, it may be, years of thought and care were lavished, has become valueless, and that his honest hopes of honour and reward have faded like a dream; for how can he put his mind in the market at the slender price of paper and printing? Many a one, too, fitted by education and taste to ornament the literature of his country, turns in despair from the path in which a thousand foreign rivals are cheered onward, and seeks in the humbler walks of practical duty the maintenance which is denied him in his proper sphere. Under such discouragement, it is no wonder that our general literature should display so few examples of successful composition, and that, with all the activity and versatility of the American mind, and with so vast a community of readers eager for novelty, there should still be so scanty a supply of the higher class of native publications. Yet the number of those who take an interest in history, fiction, and poetry is so large that the barriers which are established by law to prevent the success of native productions, are to some extent broken down, as regards these classes of subjects. But in medicine the barriers are still almost undisturbed, and foreign authors continue to be made the involuntary and chief contributors to the instruction of American physicians. Undoubtedly, there is a growing appreciation of American medical works, and, in spite of every obstacle, the number and the quality of those published are annually advancing. In the very feeling that has produced this improvement is to be found the source of the anxiety which now prevails that authors should enjoy their inalienable rights.

For many years past, the state of affairs alluded to has been attracting the attention of literary men, of whom many have endeav-

voured to procure the passage of a reciprocal law between the United States and Great Britain, by which the authors of each country should be enabled to protect their literary property in the other. Formerly, when it was almost an unheard-of thing for an American work to be republished in England, little uneasiness was felt on account of the wholesale republication of English works in America; but now that our native writers begin to be appreciated abroad, and reprints of their works are issued there in large editions, and at trivial prices, the mutual injustice begins to be more generally and more keenly felt, and a pretty unanimous desire is expressed that all ground of complaint on either side should be removed by the enactment of a liberal International Copyright Law.

The fundamental principle of such a law must be the right of property, the right to enjoy or dispose of what a man has created or acquired. In former times, the idea of property was gross and material, and was most strikingly represented by land and tenements, which hence, by way of eminence, were called *real* property. To them the earlier laws of property chiefly relate, and only at a later period did personal effects become a subject of legislation. Last of all the property which is, in truth, most real, since it is the direct creation of the mind, property in written thought, and in thought represented by mechanical inventions—this was the last to receive the protection of the law.

At this very moment, the right of a man to enjoy the fruit of the tree which he has planted and reared, to possess the full profits of his genius or talent, is denied by the laws even of the most civilized nations. He is permitted to have and to use only for a limited time what is the most truly his own of all earthly possessions, and then his property becomes the common prey of all who choose to appropriate it. Different countries began to legislate for authors and inventors at different periods. In England, the first enactment in their favour is not older than a century and a half. This limited the copyright to a very short term of years, which, after strenuous efforts, has recently been extended. But neither in England, continental Europe, or America, does the law recognize an author's rights in his works to be absolute and inalienable, and in no two countries is the same degree of right conceded. Everywhere the subject is as much a matter of statutory regulation as if the natural right of the author had no existence whatever.

An American author has, consequently, no available and legal control over his own literary productions beyond what the statute

grants him. When the period of its protection expires, his intellectual family may be torn from his arms by the first domestic trader who chooses to risk their sale, and at all times the foreigner may make merchandize of his literary progeny. The legal rights of an author, then, are of local origin and power; beyond his own country he possesses none at all, and he cannot with a show of justice complain that the foreign bookseller reprints his works. To do so would be to act the part of the dog in the fable who was fain to prevent another from enjoying what he could not possibly use.

It is the fashion now-a-days to brand as piracy the republication of foreign works, and much vulgar abuse has been bandied between France and Belgium, and between England and the United States, which, we think, the view of the subject now presented would have changed into courteous remonstrance. The legal right to republish cannot be questioned, and its existence should protect all who exercise it from reproach. The equitable right to do so is a wholly different question, one which may and ought to be fully discussed in a spirit of temperance and conciliation. If it be true, as we believe, that no such right exists, it is high time that the law and the equity of the subject should be made to harmonize by the establishment of an international copyright.

The benefits of such a law would be incalculable, springing from the one glorious consequence, that through it the thinking and therefore the governing minds of two great nations, common in their origin and language, would be brought directly into contact and fused together, strengthening one another, by communion, rivalry, and example, and would with this redoubled strength reach and maintain with ease the vantage-ground of civilization against all the world besides. Commerce may knit together nations, but only in their material interests, binding them with the bonds of selfishness; but a free intellectual commerce is the noblest of all bonds, for it knits the souls of men.

A law such as would secure the rights which we assume to be absolute and inherent is perhaps the surest expedient that could be devised for promoting our native literature. Not only would it enable publishers to offer a fair remuneration to our authors, but it would also have the effect of causing a number of foreign works to appear first in this country; and since the sphere of influence presented by the millions of American readers is so far superior to any other, many a foreigner of genius and even of established reputation would speedily be numbered amongst our adopted citizens.

Grafted thus with the strongest offshoots of the parent tree, American literature would rapidly attain a degree of luxuriance and fruitfulness, which is quite impossible under the present system of its culture, or rather neglect. But the benefits would be reciprocal; our writers would become English writers, and find an attentive and appreciating audience among a people who even now receive them gladly, and award to those who deserve it no scanty meed of praise.

Until within a short time, the copyright law of England, more liberal than our own, was construed to permit foreigners to enjoy privileges which are denied to British subjects in the United States. But by a recent decision in the Court of Exchequer, "a foreign author residing abroad, or his assigns, is not an author within the meaning, and could not have the benefit, of those acts which were intended for the encouragement of British talent and industry." In consequence of this decision, American works, which had been liberally paid for by certain English publishers, were immediately reprinted by others and sold at a reduced price; so that American books are now as completely at the mercy of the foreign trade as English works are at the mercy of our own. Considering how far from equitable the practice of American publishers has been, we dare not, with any show of reason, contend against the late unfavourable construction of the statute of Queen Anne, and must be content to witness the exclusion of our authors from a field where they were gaining emolument as well as honour, and destroying the prejudices entertained against us as an illiterate people, careless of success in any but commercial pursuits.

Nothing short of an international copyright law can place this matter upon an honourable footing; and so prevalent has the conviction of this truth become, that perhaps not a single man of letters, and scarcely a publisher of books, can now be found to oppose it. Not many years ago there was an equally general feeling adverse to the measure, at least among publishers, although there never was a time when our authors did not plead for justice to their foreign brethren and themselves. So marked yet gradual a revolution in opinion can be traced to no other cause than the power of truth. Yet it is not complete, nor will it be until Congress moulds it into the form of law, and, in conjunction with the British government, breaks down this wall of separation between two nations which else, "like kindred drops, had mingled into one."

But under a government like ours few important measures can be perfected, unless an impulse is received from without, unless the wishes

of citizens who are chiefly interested be earnestly and distinctly expressed. In the present case, we conceive that there is no body of men more directly interested than the medical profession, and no organ which it can more suitably employ than the AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION. No liberal pursuit whatever requires a larger supply of literary material than medicine; there is none which is so directly concerned with the professional literature of the Old World; none which in this country actually causes the publication of a greater number of books. If, therefore, the Association shall, as we confidently hope, see fit to commend this subject to the federal government, there is no doubt that its representations will be listened to with respect, and be allowed all the weight to which they are justly entitled. We have reason to feel encouraged by the result of our petition on another occasion, when it perhaps turned the scale to the side of justice, and crowned with success the patriotic labours which, without its aid, might have continued fruitless. But whether successful or not, the Association must feel a generous pride in asserting the claims of our national literature to be placed upon an equal footing with that of the Old World, and in contending for those rights of authors which the law is bound to recognize, since they are founded upon the unalterable principles of equity.

It is impossible to estimate the extent of good which must flow from any measure adapted to develop the literary talent of the United States. No country in the universe presents such a spectacle to the mind's eye as the prophetic maturity of this nation. Nor is the marvel only in the countless swarms of people that annually spread over the face of the land, and, after covering its plains and valleys with abundant harvests, grow clamorous for that purer and nobler food that nourishes the immortal soul. It is still more in those singular characteristics which are developed by the commingling of different races in this new world, that the mind is astonished, and filled with unspeakable forebodings of the high destiny to which we are tending. In England a not dissimilar union of the rude and delicate, of the strong and graceful, of the intellectual and boorish, has raised a small and sea-girt nation to the very pinnacle of human greatness. To that wonderful nation did Milton address these words, and could he stand in our midst this day, he could with no less truth address them to our own:—

“Lords and Commons of England! consider what a nation it is whereof ye are, and whereof ye are the governors: a nation not slow and dull, but of a quick, ingenious, and piercing spirit; acute

to invent, subtile and sinewy to discourse, not beneath the reach of any point, the highest that human capacity can soar to."

In the American character almost every element which in Europe is reckoned to be national, is transfused and blended, and if in times past we received chiefly the homelier and hardier qualities, those of a more refined and delicate nature are rapidly becoming ours. Time was, indeed, when few besides the needy and the ignorant sought a home upon these shores. But now that an ardent culture of the arts and sciences manifests the progress of our civilization, and our literature feels that it no longer lives by sufferance of foreign criticism, the educated and learned are seeking amongst us not merely a temporary shelter from the tyranny of the mob or despot, but a permanent residence, and a theatre vast enough to fill the measure of their ambition, and in which they are well contented to play their fitting parts. Within the last few years, the fine arts, general literature, natural science, and medicine itself, have all received distinguished accessions to the ranks of their cultivators. The mere presence and example of these accomplished men have done much to stimulate our own disciples of knowledge, by keeping before them a higher standard than they were accustomed to contemplate. With steady and silent progress such humanizing influences spread throughout the country, and, joining in their way the active and onward movement of our own desires for intellectual greatness, they purify and dignify our civilization, and bring the nation nearer to that proud eminence which Reason no less than Patriotism assures us that it must attain.

As a summary of the views contained in this Report, the Committee beg leave to offer for adoption the following resolutions:—

Resolved, That the Association regards the cultivation of Medical Literature as essential to professional improvement, and as adapted to form one of the broadest lines of distinction between physicians and all pretenders to the name.

Resolved, That, in the opinion of this Association, it is equally the duty and the interest of the profession to sustain its periodical literature both by literary contributions and subscription.

Resolved, That, since literary excellence is best developed by literary studies, the formation of Medical Reading Clubs, after the plan set forth in this Report, is urged especially upon physicians in places where the periodical and other medical publications of the day are not readily accessible upon other terms.

Resolved, That the Standing Committee on Medical Literature be instructed to report to the Association at its next meeting what American medical work, published during the year of their service, in their judgment is the most valuable, and that, with the consent of the Association, such work shall be formally proclaimed by the President.

Resolved, That State and local societies are hereby recommended to offer pecuniary rewards or other distinction for the best memoirs founded upon original observation.

Resolved, That Medical Colleges are hereby recommended to distinguish the best inaugural thesis of every year by a public announcement of its subject, and the name of its author, and by such other means as they may deem appropriate.

Resolved, That the sum of ONE HUNDRED DOLLARS, raised by voluntary contribution, be offered in the name of this Association for the best *experimental* essay on a subject connected either with physiology or medical chemistry, and that a committee of seven be appointed to carry out the objects of this resolution: said committee to receive the competing memoirs until the first day of March, 1851; the authors' names to be concealed from the committee, and the name of the successful competitor alone to be announced after the publication of the decision.









